



For Immediate Release

Easton, MD – February 23, 2022

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Talbot County Council Meeting Highlights, Tuesday, February 22, 2022

These highlights only reflect the business items covered from the Council's approved agenda. To view the complete County Council meeting, please visit: Talbot County Meeting Videos - Talbot County, Maryland (www.talbotcountymd.gov).

The Talbot County Council held their regularly scheduled meeting virtually on February 22 with all Council members present.

I. School Safety Issue at Easton High School

Council member Divilio read an email that was sent out from the principal of Easton High School to high school families about a third bomb threat to the school received on Tuesday, February 22. The letter asked parents to talk with their children about this issue, which is being initiated by students attending the school. According to the principal, the bomb threats have wasted valuable educational time and community resources and created frustration with school staff, students and families. Regarding future bomb threats, the letter stated, "After collaborating with Dr. Griffith and Sheriff Gamble, we have agreed to prosecute any student to the fullest extent and remove them from Easton High School."

II. Presentation by Talbot Watermen Association – Jeff Harrison, President, Talbot Watermen Association

Jeff Harrison reported that it's been a rough couple of years, not only around the world and the country but also here locally for watermen. He presented his annual Talbot County Fisheries Update for 2021. He shared the following points:

- **Year in Review:** There are 513 individual license holders in Talbot County and 246 oyster harvesting surcharges. He reported that January through March 2021 had a terrible market with quotas not being met due to lower demand caused by COVID and restaurants being closed. The market price for gillnet rockfish was also well below because there were no restaurants open. In April through September, the razor clams used for the crab bait were 50 percent less due to the 2018 heavy rains and loss of grasses. The trotliners'

crab harvest was lower than last year and the crab potters' harvest was the worst in many years. Charter boat business also suffered due to COVID mask mandates and regulations. From October through December, there was no market for eeling and no overseas sales. Watermen noticed fewer juvenile crabs which could be caused by the warm winter last year or two invasive species, snakehead and catfish. The watermen were able to oyster five days a week and had one of the best markets ever for oysters and rockfish, which are plentiful. He reported that watermen did receive funds from the CARES Act which was a great help last year.

- **Talbot County Oyster Shell Committee Report:** He reported that the Committee is funded through taxes, fees, and surcharges. Talbot County received \$78,000 for oyster replenishment efforts, adding oysters to the public fishery. The Committee plants shell and spat and is currently in the process of setting locations for the upcoming year. The Committee spent \$298,430 and yielded 37,823.88 bushels. In doing a review of the public fishery sanctuary bottom, **Broad Creek was found to be the best tributary in the Chesapeake Bay.** The spat numbers were reported to be the best counts in 20 years. The Committee attributed this to the spat and shell program. This accomplishment has not been reported on publicly and Harrison stated he did not understand why. Harrison stated that he feels they are reaching a turning point with oysters, using Virginia seed which has produced better oysters and is more disease resistant.
- **Final Report: Oyster Advisory Commission (OAC) Consensus Recommendations on Oyster Management to the Governor and General Assembly in December 2021: Management Action Recommendations.** Harrison reported that the OAC recommended that the following actions be taken to rebuild oyster populations, enhance harvest revenue, increase habitat, and reduce nitrogen and phosphorus in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay:
 - Over the next 25 years, a combination of replenishment, restoration and aquaculture activities should be collectively planned and undertaken in Eastern Bay, with an equal amount of funding for spat planting in sanctuaries (\$1M annually adjusted for inflation) and for spat and shell planting on fishery bars (\$1M annually adjusted for inflation) in addition to current replenishment and restoration activities. The effectiveness of this option should be evaluated every 5 years.
 - The OAC supports keeping the oyster fishery open.
 - The OAC supports replenishment plantings on oyster fishery bottom.
- **Nutrient Credit Program:** Harrison reported that nutrient credits were approved for aquaculture and bottom culture but not for the public fishery. The price for shells is continuously going up.
- **Outreach:** Harrison reported that the Talbot Watermen Association gives back to the community in a variety of ways, including donating both product and funds to local charity events, providing scholarships to high school students, and helping watermen who are out of work due to illness.

With regard to the public fishery sanctuary bottom and the results out of Broad Creek, Council member Pack commented, "It's very disturbing to hear that you have these other agencies at the table, having first-hand knowledge of your work and the results of that work, but yet are not willing to report on that to their own network."

III. Council Discussion of Proposed Text Amendments: Miguel Salinas, County Planner, presented the following two text amendments:

Application by Historic Bed-and-Breakfast George Brooks House, Rolles Range Road, St. Michaels, Maryland to Utilize Existing Structures in Critical Area as Additional Guest Rooms

Application by 6670 Cedar Cove, LLC to Add Definition for "Rural Retreat" to Article IX, §190-78, Talbot County Code

In accordance with Section 190-55 of the Talbot County Code, Council Vice President Leshar, Council member Divilio and Council member Pack directed that the text amendments go to the Planning Commission for further evaluation and recommendations. After receiving the recommendations of the Planning Commission, any member of the Council may introduce legislation effectuating the text amendments which would then require a public hearing.

IV. Eligible for Vote:

Resolution No. 308, A RESOLUTION TO RESCIND ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION NO. 281, A RESOLUTION TO AMEND THE TALBOT COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE WATER AND SEWER PLAN (THE "PLAN") TO RECLASSIFY AND REMAP PORTIONS OF CERTAIN REAL PROPERTY LOCATED IN THE TOWN OF TRAPPE, MARYLAND, ASSOCIATED WITH THE LAKESIDE PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (THE "LAKESIDE PROJECT") (FORMERLY KNOWN AS "TRAPPE EAST"), FURTHER DESCRIBED AS TAX MAP 54, PARCEL 304; TAX MAP 55, PARCELS 14, 15, 17, 19, 44, 65, 83, AND 85; AND, TAX MAP 59, PARCEL 4, THE TOTAL AREA CONSISTING OF EIGHT HUNDRED SIXTY-FIVE ACRES, MORE OR LESS (THE "PROPERTY"), FROM "S-2" AND "W-2" (AREAS WHERE IMPROVEMENTS OR EXTENSIONS TO EXISTING, OR CONSTRUCTION OF NEW COMMUNITY, MULTI-USE, OR SHARED SANITARY FACILITIES ARE PROGRAMMED FOR PROGRESS WITHIN THREE TO FIVE YEARS) TO "S-1" AND "W-1" (AREAS SERVED OR TO BE SERVED BY COMMUNITY, MULTI-USE, OR SHARED SANITARY FACILITIES WHICH ARE EXISTING, UNDER CONSTRUCTION, OR HAVE IMMEDIATE PRIORITY STATUS); TO AMEND THE PLAN TO ADD CERTAIN WATER AND SEWER CAPITAL PROJECTS RELATED TO THE LAKESIDE PROJECT AND EXISTING SYSTEMS FOR THE FISCAL YEARS 2020 THROUGH 2030; AND, TO AMEND THE PLAN TO UPDATE THE NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION IN THE PLAN RELATIVE TO THE LAKESIDE PROJECT AND EXISTING SYSTEMS, as amended, WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Council Vice President Leshar asked that the vote on Resolution No. 308 be postponed until the Planning Commission reviews the matter on March 1 and presents its findings and

recommendations to the Council. The Council will then vote on Resolution No. 308 at its next meeting on Tuesday, March 8.

Resolution No. 313, A RESOLUTION TO AMEND THE TALBOT COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE WATER AND SEWER PLAN REGARDING THE CONNECTION OF PHASE 1, SECTION 1 OF THE LAKESIDE PROJECT TO THE EXISTING TRAPPE WASTEWATER SYSTEM

Resolution No. 313 was brought forward for vote. Council member Price asked that the Planning Commission review the amendment that was introduced by Council Vice President Leshner at the January 25, 2022 meeting prior to a vote. Council discussion ensued about whether or not the amendment was properly introduced. Council Vice President Leshner proposed that the sponsors of Resolution No. 313 (Mr. Callahan, Mr. Leshner and Ms. Price) consider withdrawing their sponsorship of the legislation. Council President Callahan indicated his willingness to do so. Council member Price noted she would not be withdrawing her sponsorship. Mr. Divilio proposed that Resolution No. 313 be tabled. No action was taken by Council.

Bill No. 1496, A BILL TO REPEAL AND REENACT CHAPTER 102, "PARKS AND RECREATION," TALBOT COUNTY CODE AND TO ENACT A NEW CHAPTER 76 ENTITLED "GOLF BOARD"

Bill No. 1496 was brought forward for vote and unanimously approved by Council.

Council member Divilio stated, "As the liaison to the Parks Board, there is a lot of destruction that can go on in our parks, including vandalism. We want to keep this community safe, clean and a place where kids can go to these playgrounds and play and not be in any danger. This bill gives the Director of Parks and Recreation the tools that he needs to maintain the parks for the future."

Solar Regulations: County Planner Miguel Salinas reported that the County Council and the Planning Commission held a joint work session earlier in the day to discuss the County's existing solar regulations for small, medium and large-scale solar energy systems which are in Chapter 190 of the Talbot County Code. There is concern from the Planning Commission about the potential impact of large-scale (two megawatts or greater) solar energy systems in terms of their placement on prime agricultural land. He reported that the Commission would like to look at agricultural offsets to mitigate the impact of using prime agricultural land where developers would be able to contribute on a per-acre basis into a restricted county fund that can be used for matching grants to the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) program. Council Vice President Leshner directed Planning Department staff to draw up legislation for a five-month moratorium on solar installations until the Planning Commission can review the impact and propose some solutions.

Council member Divilio added, "We have one chance to get this right. This is our opportunity to put a plan together knowing that the State has a plan for this. We want to make sure that the farmland is maintained underneath these panels and used as much as possible. We also want to make sure we get the best benefit from this and can keep farmland in ag preservation. It's a

wonderful opportunity for us and I just want to make sure that we're taking full advantage of it and keeping everybody in mind as we come up with solutions.”

V. County Manager’s Report:

• **Preserve at Wye Mills:** County Engineer Ray Clarke requested the Council's approval to send a letter to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to have the county assume ownership and operation of the Preserve at Wye Mills’ wastewater treatment plant as was discussed during the November 9 Council meeting. Mr. Clarke outlined that there will need to be an amendment to the County’s Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan and the County will also need to draft the transfer agreement. The Council voted unanimously to send the letter to MDE.

• **Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) Increase for County Employees:** County Manager Clay Stamp asked that a mid-year 3.5 percent Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) increase be awarded to employees in response to inflationary pressures combined with a marked increase in competitive demand for jobs across the local government sector. He stated, “This is an opportunity for the Council to send a small, but important, message to our dedicated employees that they are highly valued and are key to the effective delivery of services to our community.” Stamp reported that there will be further consideration regarding compensation in developing the FY23 budget in response to the completion of a Comprehensive Compensation study being finalized. This action addresses a key part of the County’s plan to address personnel, processes, and projects. The Council voted unanimously to approve the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increase for all county employees retroactive to January 1, 2022.

Council member Price commented, “It is difficult to make these decisions mid-year, but sometimes you have to do something. We have the best employees I think of any of the counties in the state. We're getting feedback on a compensation study that's been being done to figure out where our salaries need to be adjusted. So, this is a step in the right direction.”

Council President Callahan added, “We have over 500 employees, both full-time and part-time. I think they need reassurance that they're needed and appreciated. The last couple of years has been hard on all of us. It's important that we show positivity to these employees and support them and their families. Inflation is going up and this increase could make a big difference to families.”

The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m. The next Council meeting will be held in person on March 8 at 6:00 p.m. in the Bradley Meeting Room.